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Message Text

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R 031216Z AUG 76
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7464
INFO AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGUI 1457

E.O. . 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, US, CT
SUBJECT: THE COUP D'ETAT - SIX MONTHS ON

1. SUMMARY: AUGUST 3 MARKS THE END OF A SIX MONTH PERIOD SINCE THE ABORTIVE COUP ATTEMPT AGAINST PRESIDENT BOKASSA. A CERTAIN CALM AND SENSE OF STABILITY HAS RETURNED TO THE COUNTRY. THE PRESIDENT HAS MENDED FENCES WITH HIS NEIGHBORS, HAS SEARCHED FOR AND FOUND NEW SOURCES OF AID AND HAS BEGUN THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL RE-STRUCTURING DESIGNED TO STRENGTHEN HIS INTERNAL POSITION AND TO PROVIDE A BASIS FOR FUTURE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES HAVE IMPROVED, AND A CERTAIN MOMENTUM HAS BEEN ACHIEVED. THIS MOMENTUM CAN BE MAINTAINED IF PROGRAMS AND AGREEMENTS NOW PLANNED OR ANTICIPATED COME TO FRUITION ON SCHEDULE AND IF WE FOCUS ON THE ELEMENTS OF INTERDEPENDENCE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP. DESPITE THE INHERENT CAPRICIOUSNESS OF THE REGIME RELATIVELY STABLE AND PRODUCTIVE BILATERAL RELATIONS MAY NOW BE ATTAINABLE. END CONFIDENTIAL

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SUMMARY

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2. THE ATTEMPTED COUP D'ETAT OF FEBRUARY 3 SEVERELY RENT THE POLITICAL FABRIC OF THE CAR AND DRAMATICALLY BROUGHT INTO QUESTION THE BASIC STABILITY OF PRESIDENT BOKASSA'S TEN YEAR OLD REGIME. BOKASSA WAS PERSONALLY DEEPLY SHOCKED BY THE FEBRUARY EVENTS, AND TO A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE IS STILL OBSESSED BY THEM. IN THE FIRST THREE MONTHS WE SAW A WITHDRAWAL AND CLOSING IN ON HIMSELF OF THE PRESIDENT. HE GAVE UP FOREIGN TRAVEL, RESTRICTED CABINET MEMBERSHIP TO HIS OWN POLITICALLY RELAIBLE TRIBE, AND CREATED WHAT POLITICAL OBSERVERS CAME TO CONSIDER A "FORTRESS BOKASSA" APPROACH TO THE COUNTRY'S INTERNAL PROBLEMS AND FOREIGN RELATIONS. UNWILLING AT FIRST TO ADMIT THE EXISTENCE OF INTERNAL WEAKNESSES IN THE SYSTEM WHICH HE HAD SO LABORIOUSLY CREATED OVER THE PAST DECADE AND WHICH BORE SO UNMISTAKENLY HIS OWN PERSONAL STAMP, HE LASHED OUT AT EXTERNAL POWERS, NOTABLY FRANCE AND THE US, INCREASED HIS CONTROLS OVER FOREIGN BUSINESSES INCLUDING OUR OWN DIAMOND INVESTMENT, AND PLAYED UP HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH THE SOVIETS, HIS ERSTWHILE BETES NOIRES. OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS SUFFERED AND A LACK OF DIRECT COMMUNICATION BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS ENSUED.

3. WITH CHARACTERISTIC RESILIENCY, HOWEVER, THE PRESIDENT HAS BOUNCED BACK FROM THE SHOCK OF FEBRUARY TO RESTORE A DEGREE OF NORMALCY IN GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS. RECENT CABINET CHANGES HAVE BEEN THE RETURN OF MANY OLD-TIME POLITICAL FIGURES AND FORMER CONFIDANTS. A COMPLETE OVERHAOUL OF THE COUNTRY'S SOLE POLITICAL PARTY MESAN HAS BEEN SET IN MOTION WITH THE LAUDABLE GOAL OF MOBILIZING MORE EFFECTIVE THE NATION'S YOUTH AND WORKERS. THE MOST URGENT DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS ARE RECEIVING GREATER ATTENTION, IF NOT AS YET EFFECTIVE REMEDIAL ACTIONS.

4. ON THE FOREIGN PLANE THE PRESIDENT HAS MADE ASSIDUOUS EFFORTS TO MEND FENCES WITH HIS NEIGHBORS BY VISITS TO ZAIRE AND CAMEROUN AND BY THE RECEPTION OF THE CHADIAN HEAD OF STATE AND CONGOLESE AND SUDANESE DELEGATIONS HERE. IN ADDITION THE PRESIDENT HAS ACCELERATED HIS SEARCH FOR NEW SOURCES OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. HE HAS BEGUN TO TAP THE RESOURCES OF THE ARAB WORLD FOR THE FIRST TIME, PLAYING UP TO POTENTIAL ARAB DONORS
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IRRESPECTIVE OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY. THUS, THE FIRST ARABIAN CORPORATION REPRESENTING SAUDI INTERESTS HAS BROUGHT NEW INVESTMENT CAPITAL, AND AID AGREEMENT WITH THE IRAQIS HAS BEEN SIGNED, AND THE ARRIVAL OF A LIBYAN EMBASSY SUGGESTS THAT ASSISTANCE MAY BE FORTHCOMING FROM THAT QUARTER AS WELL. SO FAR THERE HAS BEEN A MINIMUM OF RADICALIZATION OF THE GOCAR'S BASIC POLITICAL PRINCIPLES, ALTHOUGH BOKASSA HAS PERMITTED MORE RADICAL RHETORIC THAN IN THE PAST BOTH IN AN INTERVIEW BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER IN TRIPOLI AND IN

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A CAR-IRAQI JOINT COMMUNIQUE. THE NEXT UNGA, HOWEVER, WILL BE THE REAL TEST OF WHETHER THE ARABS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN PERMANENTLY ALTERING THE CAR'S TRADITIONAL MODERATION ON MIDDLE EASTERN ISSUES.

5. IN TERMS OF THE MAJOR POWERS BOKASSA HAS ALSO PUT RELATIONS ONTO A MORE EVEN KEEL. BEGINNING WITH THE VISIT OF AF/C DIRECTOR BUCHANAN IN MAY, BUT SUSTAINED THROUGHOUT THE EMBASSY'S BICENTENNIAL ACTIVITIES, THERE HAS BEEN A NOTICABLE WARMING OF US-CAR RELATIONS. ALTHOUGH THE CANCELLATION OF THE SCRANTON VISIT WAS AN ABERRATION IN THIS PATTERN, RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND A WILLINGNESS ON THE PRESIDENT'S PART TO CONSIDER REMOVING BILATERAL ECONOMIC ISSUES ARE HOPEFUL SIGNS. EVIDENTLY THE PRESIDENT DESIRES TO KEEP HIS OPTIONS OPEN VIS-A-VIS THE US AND FOR THE TIME BEING AT LEAST INTENDS TO REFRAIN FROM DIRECT ATTACKS ON THE US, WHATEVER SUSPICIONS HE MAY STILL HARBOR ABOUT OUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE FEBRUARY EVENTS. RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION HAVE COOLED SOMEWHAT FROM THEIR MARCH EUPHORIA, BUT BOKASSA'S GOVERNMENT HAS RECENTLY SIGNED A NEW CULTURAL ACCORD WHICH WILL MODESTLY EXPAND SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN THE CAR. THE SOVIETS HAVE, HOWEVER, BEEN PUT ON NOTICE, AS HAVE WE THAT THEY CANNOT TAKE THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CAR FOR GRANTED AND THAT FRIENDSHIP WILL CONTINUE TO BE JUDGED TO A GREAT EXTENT BY THE AMOUNT OF DIRECT ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED. EVEN FRANCE FINDS ITSELF IN THE SAME AMBIGUOUS SITUATION: CRITICIZED FOR ITS COLONIAL PAST AND SUSPECTED OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE FEBRUARY COUP IT REMAINS THE ESSENTIAL ECONOMIC PROP FOR THE REGIME (TO TH TUNE OF SOME DOLS 25 MILLION PER ANNUM). ALTHOUGH FRUSTRATED WITH THEIR ROLE, THE FRENCH SEEM WILLING TO MAINTAIN THEIR SUPPORT IN THE INTERESTS OF THEIR INVESTMENTS, THE POSSIBILITY OF EXPLOITING THE COUNTRY'S SUBSTANTIAL URANIUM DEPOSITS, AND THE MODERATE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL STANCE WHICH THE CONFIDENTIAL

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CAR CONTINUES TO ADOPT.

6. THE MORE IDIOSYNCRATIC ELEMENTS OF BOKASSA'S FOREIGN POLICY REMAIN ESSENTIALLY UNCHANGED. TRADE AND AID LINKS WITH SOUTH AFRICA GO ON UNIMPEDED, AND THE GOVERNMENT AVOIDS EXTREMIST RHETORIC ON SOUTHERN AFRICAN ISSUES. BOKASSA CONTINUES TO BE A STAUNCH SUPPORTER OF SOUTH KOREA, AND HAS RECENTLY AUTHORIZED HIS FOREIGN MINISTER TO VISIT BOTH SEOUL AND TAIPEI. WHETHER RELATIONS WITH TAIPEI WILL LONG ENDURE IS UNCERTAIN, BUT AS LONG AS THE ROC PROVIDES SIGNIFICANT AID THE RELATIONSHIP WILL PROBABLY SURVIVE. NORMALIZATION WITH ISRAEL DOES NOT SEEM TO BE ON THE CARDS BUT SEMI CLANDESTINE CONTACTS ARE MAINTAINED, AND AN ISRALI ADVISOR IS INFLUENTIAL AT THE PALACE ADN ACTS AS THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL GO-BETWEEN WITH THE SOUTH AFRICANS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGUI 1457

7. THE REAL QUESTION MARK FOR THE FUTURE IS THE ECONOMY. PRODUCTION OF RAW MATERIALS, INCLUDING DIAMONDS, IS DEPRESSED; LACK OF TRAINED MIDDLE LEVEL PERSONNEL IS ACUTE; AND OVERLY CENTRALIZED DECISION MAKING INHIBITS THE IMPLEMENTION OF DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES. NONETHELESS THERE ARE SOME SIGNS THAT INVESTMENT IS PICKING UP; NEW SOURCES OF AID, INCLUDING A MAJOR WORLD BANK ROAD LOAN, ARE IN THE PIPELINE, AND THE PRESIDENT MAY BE BEGINNING TO PROVIDE NEW INCENTIVES TO FOREIGN PRIVATE INVESTMENT. THE PRESIDENT SEEMS TO REALIZE THAT HIS PAST POLITICAL TROUBLES WERE IN PART A REFLECTION OF THE SOCIETY'S ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES AND CANNOT MERELY BE ATTIBUTED TO EXTERNAL "DEI EX MACHINA." THIS REALIZATION IF IN ITSELF A HOPEFUL SIGN AND A NECESSARY PRECONDITION TO ANY RIGHTING OF THE CAR'S ECONOMY. THE PRESIDENT HAS RECENTLY MOVED TO GET A MORE DIRECT AND PERSONAL CONTROL OVER THE ECONOMY BY ABOLISHING THE DEVELOPMENT BANK AND BE CREATING NUMEROUS GOVERNMENT SPONSORED COMPANIES. HE HAS ALSO MOVED SUCCESSFULLY

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TO CHECK INFLATION THROUGH A PRICE FREEZE ON ENERGY, WHICH IS A
STATE CONTROLLED MONOPOLY, USING CONTINUING FRENCH ASSISTANCE
HE HAS MANAGED TO KEEP CIVIL SERVICE DISSATISFACTION
WITHIN BOUNDS BY MAKING REASONABLY REGULAR SALARY PAYMENTS.
THE SINGLE GREATEST WEAKNESS, HOWEVER, REMAINS THE CONCENTRATION
OF ECONOMIC (AND POLITICAL) DECISION MAKING IN THE
PRESIDENT'S HANDS, WHICH DELAYS POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND
WEAKENS THE AUTHORITY OF MINISTERS AND BUREAUCRATS.

8. BUT WHAT OF THE FUTURE, PARTICULARLY US-CAR RELATIONS?
THE NEXT SIX MONTHS PROVIDE A NUMBER OF SOLID OPPORTUNITIES
TO MAINTAIN AND PERHAPS TO EXPAND THE BASICALLY PRODUCTIVE
POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. IN ALL
PROBABILITY WE WILL BE SIGNING THE LARGEST BILATERAL AID
AGREEMENT IN THE RECENT HISTORY OF OUR RELATIONS (THE DOLS 1.3
MILLION OUHAM HEALTH PROJECT). THE PEACE CORPS WILL
REACH RECORD LEVELS (BETWEEN 60 AND 70 VOLUNTEERS). THESE
ACTIONS ARE TANGIBLE EVIDENCE OF OUR SUPPORT AND CONCERN.
ALREADY THE NEW PEACE FORPS LEVELS HAVE BEEN WELCOMED BY
SENIOR GOCAR OFFICIALS AND HAVE LEAD TO PROMPT FOLLOW-ON
SUPPORT FROM THE MINISTRIES CONCERNED. IN THE SAME PERIOD
THERE WILL ALSO BE A NUMBER OF SYMBOLIC WAYS OF DEMONSTRATING
OUR INVOLVEMENT AND OUR INTEREST IN THE CAR, PARTICULARLY
THE AIDSAT DEMONSTRATION IN LATE SEPTEMBER IN WHICH THE
PRESIDENT HIMSELF WILL TAKE PART. IT WOULD BE WELL TO
CAPITALIZE ON THIS EVENT WITH A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT FORD
PERHAPS READ BY A SENIOR DEPARTMENT OFFICER. IN ADDITION WE
ANTICIPATE A VIGOROUS CULTURAL PROGRAM WITH ACTIVITIES IN
AREAS OF INTEREST TO THE PRESIDENT: A BLACK PRESENCE EXHIBIT,
CONCERTS BY JAZZ GUITARIST MCHOUSTON BAKER AND THE MAJOR
TREASURES OF SPACE SHOW EARLY IN 1977. IN ALL OF THESE
EVENTS WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN THE VISIBILITY OF OUR
PRESENCE AND THE MOMENTUM IN OUR RELATIONS, CULMINATING HOPEFULLY
WITH AN UNOFFICIAL PRESIDENTIAL VISIT TO WASHINGTON IN THE
SPRING OR SUMMER OF 1977.

9. THE AGENDA IS BEFORE US. WHAT THE EMBASSY WILL NEED FROM
ALL AGENCIES IN WASHINGTON IS A WILLINGNESS TO DEVELOP, FINANCE
AND SUPPORT NEW AND INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS, BE THEY AID, PEACE
CORPS, CULTURAL OR INFORMATIONAL. ALTHOUGH AN ELEMENT OF
UNCERTAINTY WILL REMAIN, GIVEN PRESIDENT BOKASSA'S
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MERCURIAL PERSONALITY AND THE INHERENT TENSIONS IN CENTRAL

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AFRICAN SOCIETY, THERE IS NOW AT LEAST THE POSSIBILITY OF BRING-
ING A DEGREE OF STABILITY INTO WHAT HAS OFTEN BEEN AN ERRATIC
AND UNPREDICTABLE RELATIONSHIP. THE ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE OF
OUR EFFORTS WILL BE TO MAINTAIN CENTRAL AFRICAN SUPPORT ON
ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO US AND TO PROVICE US CONTINUED ECONOMIC
ACCESS TO THE RESOURCES OF THE COUNTRY. A SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT
OF RECIPROCITY IS INVOLVED SINCE BY SO DOING WE NOT ONLY
CONTRIBUTE TO THE CAR'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUT ALSO TO THE
POLITICAL POSITION OF PRESIDENT BOKASSA. BY FOCUSSING ON THE
INTERDEPENDENCE OF OUR INTERESTS WE SHALL TRY TO MAKE SURE THAT OUR
RELATIONSHIPS PROSPER. THE NEXT YEAR WILL DEMONSTRATE WHETHER WE
CAN BE SUCCESSFUL OR NOT.
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